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ON many occasions in the past the Swiss Mercantile Society and its College in Fitzroy Square have appeared in these columns. In 1978 we reported the society's 90th anniversary, a very happy event.

Since then things have changed, and today the occasion is anything but a joyful one. The future of the College is threatened as the number of students has gone down alarmingly. All language schools are experiencing difficulties. Some use means of publicity which are not always fair.

The SMS has not had to publicise the College in recent years, except perhaps after the war when it was re-opened and had to start from scratch. But numbers increased, and soon there was an annual intake of many hundreds of students.

Today the picture is bleak, and unless there is a rapid increase the College cannot continue as at present.

We all have friends and relatives in Switzerland and in other Swiss communities abroad who may be planning a stay in Britain. We can tell them about the excellent tuition at the College for, thanks to the BIGA subsidy, only well-qualified teachers are employed.

The fact that the students are Swiss only has the great

advantage that tuition can be built on roughly the same basic schooling, and French and German can be used in translation.

One often hears the criticism that the students just talk Swiss together. It may be that some do but at no other foreign language school do they meet *English students*. There they have the disadvantage of having to sit in classes with Eastern, African and South American students whose basic schooling varies so greatly that teaching often becomes very complex and progress is slow.

Of major importance is the fact that courses at the SMS College are considerably cheaper than at comparable London language schools.

Another advantage is that the SMS College is the only London school where students can follow the Stolze-Schrey shorthand system. Of great importance is the fact that the diploma of the SMS College is fully accepted in the business world in Switzerland.

Swissair sends its apprentice staff to the SMS College for English tuition. If anyone knows the importance of the English language well learned it is a company like Swissair whose international language, after all, is English.

Apart from day courses there are classes in the late afternoon. We all know au pair girls and other young Swiss temporarily in London so why not induce them to go there rather than to some little-known school of dubious reputation?

Recommend a day course at the SMS College to au pair girls as a useful ending of their stay in London. And let us write to friends and relatives in Switzerland about the College and talk about it when we are there.

The secretary, Mr R. Kaenzig, will gladly send information, prospectuses, etc, on request. The address is: SMS, 34/35 Fitzroy Square, London W1P 6BP. Tel: 01-637 3609.

The College was founded in 1923, although the SMS held evening classes before the ending of the First World War and started full-time courses in English and commercial subjects before then. But in January 1923 the College opened in a suite of six rooms in Henrietta Street off the Strand.

It moved to the present building, Swiss House, in December 1926, and the SMS acquired the freehold in 1972. It was modernised, and thanks to a gift from the Swiss National Day Fund it was refurnished. It has an excellent staff and also a language laboratory.

It is supervised by a council and education committee of Swiss businessmen and women, all members of the Swiss Mercantile Society, which incidentally is open to all Swiss engaged in business of any kind or connected with economics, banking or insurance etc.

In a few weeks, the College will celebrate its diamond jubilee. Let us all help to make it a day of hope for the future.

Mariann Meier

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